

Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference 8/18

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Each week I share with you some relevant and recent Banner data to provide you with a glimpse of what we are seeing and experiencing in our hospitals as it relates to COVID. I hope that you find the information helpful to inform your stories, and I do apologize in advance if I am unable to answer any of your specific requests for data.

Please keep in mind that Banner reports all its hospitalization data to state health departments. In Arizona, the trends that you see on the AzDHS dashboard closely align with what we are seeing within our system. Banner is the largest health care provider in the state, and we care for nearly half of the COVID patients who are hospitalized in Arizona.

Today I will share some new data with you regarding vaccination status of our COVID patients in Arizona. Of the COVID patients who were hospitalized at a Banner facility last week, 94% were unvaccinated. These patients are younger than those we treated in prior surges, with most between 20 to 60 years of age.

Here is what this information tells me... The COVID vaccines are working. They are extremely effective in preventing serious illness and death. Yes, you might still become infected with COVID after you are vaccinated, but as our data clearly

demonstrates, vaccination will significantly reduce your chances of needing care in one of our hospitals.

This past week we have continued to see an increase in COVID hospitalizations, ICU admissions and ventilator usage in Arizona. This is in addition to much higher than normal non-COVID volume.

Last week our total number of ICU patients in Arizona – COVID and non-COVID – was as high as it was during the peak of the summer 2020 surge. That said, only 30% of those patients are COVID positive at this time compared to the last surge when 50-60% were COVID positive.

The high number of non-COVID patients in our ICUs is due, in part, to the fact that many delayed care in 2020 because of the pandemic, and they are now seeking care for illnesses and medical issues that have become more severe. The high number of non-COVID patients that we are caring for, coupled with the week-over-week increase in COVID hospitalizations, is troubling.

We continue to see exponential growth of pediatric COVID hospitalizations. In just the first two weeks of August, we had as many pediatric COVID admissions as we did in the entire month of July. We are currently on pace to surpass the number of pediatric COVID patients that we saw during the winter surge. As I have mentioned in prior weeks, most of our pediatric

COVID patients at this time do not required intensive care or ventilator support.

Staffing will remain one of our greatest challenges during the pandemic. We continue our efforts to fill core positions as well as bring in travel nurses and respiratory therapists to provide support this fall and winter. Due to rising volumes, we have once again initiated our corporate redeployment program. Corporate employees now have the option to sign up for shifts in our hospitals, including at the bedside for those corporate team members who have clinical credentials.

As I always do, I'll close out my opening remarks with an ask for all of you. Please get vaccinated as soon as possible. Do it to protect yourself from serious illness and death, and please do it to support the health care systems in your community. They sacrificed so much for you and rose to the occasion during the prior two surges when there was no solution as effective as vaccine to prevent hospitalizations. We now have that solution available to us, and we need everyone to take it.

Thank you.